Giving Feedback about Participation in a Group Project

Materials compliments of Professor Robert Duran, Communication

Negative Feedback

Obviously there will be times when you are displeased about the way a person is performing his/her job. Saying nothing is not likely to be effective. You may want to wait until you are completing the official performance review, but in other situations you may feel it is best to let the person know immediately. Before giving negative feedback, consider whether the following conditions have been met:

1. The feedback is about something the person can change.
2. Your intention is to help the person, not hurt him/her. You feel the person will be receptive to feedback.

When you give the feedback, there are several guidelines to follow:

1. Give a specific, accurate description of the behavior. Don't exaggerate the behavior to make it sound worse or more serious. Be precise and accurate. Tell the person, "You have missed 5 deadlines in the past month," rather than, "You never get anything in on time."
2. Describe the effect of the behavior. "By missing those deadlines, the people who need your work to complete theirs have also missed their deadlines." By describing the effects of the behavior, you are more likely to convince the person that the behavior has significant consequences and therefore must be changed.
3. Discuss how the person can change the behavior. People do not always know exactly what they should do to change a behavior or what they should change it to. Be ready to discuss that with the person.

When you give negative feedback, there are several things you should NOT do:

1. Don't over—elaborate, defend, or argue once your statement has been understood. If the person needs clarification, give it, but don't defend your feedback.
2. Avoid labels, references to traits, or moralizations. Focus on cause and effect rather than good and bad.
3. Don't try to take away negative feelings the person might express by softening your feedback, retracting it, praising the person, etc. When people receive negative feedback, they usually experience emotions. Use your active listening skills if the person wants to talk, but don't belittle your feedback by saying, "It's not that big of a deal."